History of the National School Lunch Program

Excerpts from: *The National School Lunch Program Background and Development* by Gordon W. Gunderson[1], FNS 63-Food and Nutrition Service, USDA.

School food service programs, such as we have currently, did not just happen overnight nor even during the past decade. Preceding today's programs is a long history of more than a hundred years of development, of testing and evaluating and of constant research to provide the best in nutrition, nutrition education and food service for the nation's millions of children in school.

Though various efforts at school, food services were carried on in this country as far back as the 1890's; some European countries were operating rather extensive programs a hundred years before.

Germany

In 1790 a combined program of teaching and feeding hungry, vagrant children was begun in Munich, Germany. In 1875, needy children were supplied free textbooks, clothing, and food by the Philanthropic School Society in Hamburg. Similar societies sprang up in other cities as well. Privately funded societies for the special purpose of school feeding organized later; the Society for Feeding Needy School Children at Dresden in 1880 being one of the first.

France

A great Frenchman, Victor Hugo, while exiled in Guernsey in 1865, provided the funds for hot meals for children in a nearby school. Six years later the Society for People's Kitchens in the Public Schools was established in Angers, France. The objective was to furnish meals at school to children who were unable to pay. A two-cent charge was made to those who could pay.

As early as 1867, Victor Duray, then minister of public instruction, had requested school officials to give special attention to the nutrition of the children. This resulted in establishing school lunch programs for needy children in about 464 places.

Paris began school canteens in 1877, providing meals at public expense for children whose parents' names were on the Poor Board list. Two years later, the city council voted to support the program and canteens were set up in every school district. Initially, a part of the support was derived from local sources. However, the city subsidy was increased from year to year until the total cost was at city expense. Teachers supervised the lunch programs but required extra pay for their services—25 cents per day.

Participation was open to all children, regardless of ability to pay. Those who could pay were charged an amount equal to the cost of the food. Cost of equipment and labor was not included. The anonymity of children receiving free meals was fully protected through a system of lunch ticket sales. Children who could pay were required to do so, and identical tickets were given free of charge to the children who could not pay.

England

In England the passage in 1905 of the *Education (Provision of Meals) Act* was the culmination of the efforts of 365 private, charitable organizations in attempting to provide meals at school for needy children and reflection of national concern over the physical condition of the populace.

The *Provision of Meals Act* was passed by Parliament in December 1905. The Act provided that

> "When the local education authority resolve that any of the children in attendance at any public elementary school within their area are unable by reason of lack of food to take full advantage of the education provided them, the local education authority shall take such steps as they think fit to provide for such children, under such regulations and conditions as the local education authority may prescribe (including if they so resolve, the making of a charge to recover the cost from the parent or guardian), such food as the local education authority may consider requisite to enable the said children to take full advantage of the education provided for them."[2]

The circular sent out to schools by the National Board of Education concerning the intent of the Act stated, among other things

> "and it aims at securing that for this purpose suitable meals shall be available just as much for those whose parents are in a position to pay as for those to whom food must be given free of cost."[3]

Holland

By royal decree in 1900, Holland authorized municipalities to supply food and clothing to public or private school children who were unable, because of the lack of food and clothes, to go regularly to school or to those who probably would not continue to attend school regularly unless food and clothes were provided. Thus, Holland became the first country to adopt national legislation specifically to provide school lunches.

Switzerland

In Switzerland lunches were provided to about 8 percent of the primary school children by private societies. This was done to encourage attendance by children who lived long distances from school and could not go home for the noonday meal. An investigation was made into the situation by one Dr. Huber. He found that teachers supported school feeding enthusiastically because of better attendance, improved attention, and better scholastic work by the children. Dr. Huber's findings and recommendations resulted in a national order being issued in 1903 making it an obligation on the part of municipalities to furnish food and clothing to children in need. Consequently, the program grew rapidly and in 1906 the use of state funds was authorized for this purpose.

Other European Cities

By the early 1900's, school feeding had spread throughout most of the European countries. In Milan and San Remo, Italy, meals had been furnished during the 1890's and the responsibility was taken over by the municipalities. By 1914 some 50 Italian cities were conducting some kind of school feeding programs. In Austria, Sweden, Belgium, Denmark and Norway programs were underway.[4]

Norway's "Oslo Breakfast" was a new venture in school feeding in Norway, although Christiania (Oslo) had been providing noonday meals since 1897. The Oslo Breakfast consisted of: 1/2 pint milk, whole meal bread, cheese, 1/2 orange, and 1/2 apple. From September to March, one dose of cod-liver oil was included. This program spread to other parts of Scandinavia very rapidly, and was tried out in London as an experiment to determine its effect upon 130 children from poor families entitled to free meals. Said Professor J. Drumming of London University:

> "The effects have been remarkable."

Children were free from the usual skin complaints, and boys gained in height 25 percent more than those not participating in the experiment.[5]

Early Programs in the United States

In spite of information available from the vast experience and progress made in most of the nations of Europe, school feeding in the United States underwent the same evolution as in Europe, beginning with sporadic food services undertaken by private societies and associations interested

in child welfare and education. The Children's Aid Society of New York initiated a program in 1853, serving meals to students attending the vocational school. However, it did not gain sufficient momentum to convince other organizations or municipalities to do likewise.[6]

There can be no doubt that *Poverty*, a 1904 book by Robert Hunter, had a strong influence upon the U.S. effort to feed hungry, needy children in school.

Hunter was vitally concerned with hunger, particularly among the children in poor families.

> "…but the poverty of any family is likely to be most serious at the very time when the children most need nurture, when they are most dependent, and when they are obtaining the only education which they are ever to receive. Guidance and supervision of the parents are impossible because there are too many hungry mouths to feed; learning is difficult because hungry stomachs and languid bodies and thin blood are not able to feed the brain. The lack of learning among so many poor children is certainly due, to an important extent, to this cause. There must be thousands very likely sixty or seventy thousand children in New York City alone who often arrive at school hungry and unfitted to do well the work required. It is utter folly, from the point of view of learning, to have a compulsory school law which compels children, in that weak physical and mental state which results from poverty, to drag themselves to school and to sit at their desks, day in and day out, for several years, learning little or nothing. If it is a matter of principle in democratic America that every child shall be given a certain amount of instruction, let us render it possible for them to receive it, as monarchial countries have done, by making full and adequate provision for the physical needs of the children who come from the homes of poverty."[7]

Philadelphia

Toward the turn of the century significant efforts at school feeding were evidenced almost simultaneously in Philadelphia and Boston. In Philadelphia, the Starr Center Association began serving penny lunches in one school in 1894, later expanding the service to another. Soon a lunch committee was established and lunches were extended to include nine schools in the city.

Dr. Cheesman A. Herrick, who was principal of the William Penn High School for Girls when it first opened in 1909, is credited with accomplishing the transfer of responsibilities for operation and support of the lunch program from charitable organizations to the Philadelphia School Board. He requested that a system be established to assure that the lunches served would be based upon sound principles of nutrition and required that the program be under the direction of a home economics graduate. The Board granted his request on an experimental basis and on the condition that the program would be self-supporting. The experiment proved successful, and the following year lunch services were extended to Southern Manual Training School and later to three additional units.

In the spring of 1912, the School Board established a Department of High School Lunches and directed that the food service be inaugurated in all the high schools of the city.

During all this time the Home and School League had continued operating the feeding program in the nine elementary schools, and continued to do so until May of 1915, when it reported to the Board that the need for a lunch system had been clearly demonstrated and that it could not be successfully operated by an organization outside the school system. As a result, the School Board placed the operation of both high school and elementary lunch programs under the supervision of the Department of High School Lunches and authorized the extension of the program to other elementary schools. Under the Herrick plan, light, heat, cooking gas and the original equipment were supplied by the Board. Otherwise, the program was to be self-supporting.[8]

Boston

Early programs in Boston were inaugurated under the auspices of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union. According to a report of the Union's activities in 1908, the organization had begun serving hot lunches in September of that year to high schools which were under the supervision of the Boston School Committee. A central kitchen system was used and lunches were transported to the participating schools. There was a school lunch advisory committee which set the policy for the program and actual administration of the program was in the hands of a lunchroom superintendent and a director of school lunches.[9]

Milwaukee

In 1904, the same year that *Poverty* was published, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, began its efforts at meeting the need when the Women's School Alliance of Wisconsin began furnishing lunches to children in three centers located in areas where both parents were working and the greatest need was evident. The project was supported by donations from private individuals, churches, societies and clubs. The lunches were prepared in the homes of women who lived near the schools and were willing to cook and serve the meals. Improvement in attendance and scholarship was noted, and six additional centers were in operation by 1910.

School Feeding Supported

In the year following the publication of Hunter's *Poverty*, there appeared another similar publication dealing with poverty and the plight of poverty-stricken families. This was John Spargo's *The Bitter Cry of the Children*. Like Hunter, Spargo dwelt extensively upon the misfortunes of children and the effect of malnourishment upon their physical and mental well-being. He estimated, after very careful study, that

> "not less than 2,000,000 children of school age in the United States are the victims of poverty which denies them common necessities, particularly adequate nourishment. Such children are in very many cases incapable of successful mental effort, and much of our national expenditure for education is in consequence an absolute waste."[10]

The introduction to the *Bitter Cry of the Children* was supplied by none other than Robert Hunter, the author of *Poverty*. In commenting upon Mr. Spargo's publication, he states,

> "Few of us sufficiently realize the powerful effect upon life of adequate nutritious food. Few of us ever think of how much it is responsible for our physical and mental advancement or what a force it has been in forwarding our civilized life."

Mr. Spargo's emphasis upon the importance and appropriateness of feeding the school children is borne out in the following quotations from his book:

> "To the contention that society, having assumed the responsibility of insisting that every child shall be educated, and providing the means of education, is necessarily bound to assume the responsibility of seeing that they are made fit to receive that education, so far as possible, there does not seem to be any convincing answer. It will be objected that for society to do this would mean the destruction of the responsibility of the parents. That is obviously true. But it is equally true of education itself, the responsibility for which society has assumed. Some individualists there are who contend that society is wrong in doing this, and their opposition to the proposal that it should undertake to provide the children with food is far more logical than that of those who believe that society should assume the responsibility of educating the child, but not that of equipping it with the necessary physical basis for that education."

New York

Robert Hunter has estimated that there were sixty or seventy thousand school children in New York who were not capable of doing good schoolwork because of malnourishment. As has been previously noted, the situation had no doubt been recognized by the Children's Aid Society of New York as far back as 1853. In that year they began serving lunches to students at a vocational school. No significant programs in the public schools developed, however, until 1908 when Dr. William H. Maxwell, superintendent of schools, made a special plea in his report to the Board of Education.

> "Again I appeal to you, in the name of suffering childhood, to establish in each school facilities whereby the pupils may obtain simple wholesome food at cost price."

A school lunch committee consisting of physicians and social workers was thereupon organized to find out whether a lunch might be self-supporting at a three-cent charge to students. Two schools were selected on a trial basis. Two years later the board authorized expansion of the program to other schools of the city and agreed that the board would pay the cost of equipment and gas and supply the necessary rooms. The cost of food and labor was to be met from the sale of lunches.

Until January 1920, lunches in the elementary schools of New York had been supported by volunteer social organizations. In the 1919–20 school year, the Board of Education assumed full responsibility for all programs in Manhattan and the Bronx, and in the following year for all the programs.

Cleveland

Elementary school lunch service began in Cleveland, Ohio, on December 6, 1909, when the Cleveland Federation of Women's Clubs began serving breakfasts to 19 children at the Eagle School. One additional school was added in 1910, and by 1915 meals were being provided for all special classes in the grade schools, excepting the school for the deaf. In total about 710 children were being provided for each day.

In the summer of 1909, lunchrooms were installed in seven high schools in Cleveland. For 16 years prior to this, lunches had been provided by "lunch wagons" going to the schools or by stores in the vicinity serving hot meals at noon. In some schools the "basket lunches" were served on the school premises by caterers. Even after the installation of lunchrooms and equipment in the seven high schools, the operations in the schools were actually conducted by the former caterers under contract with the Board of Education on a concessionaire basis. In the contract the Board of Education agreed to furnish all the necessary equipment, as well as heat, light, gas and water, sufficient for the proper maintenance of the lunchrooms, and to replace all equipment rendered useless through natural wear and tear.

In 1914–15 the normal school and all high schools except two were provided with lunch services. This involved a total of 6,715 students. All items served were priced a la carte/special sales and a typical "menu" offered a selection from about 15 items, including milk.

> "In some schools the range of choice is too great, in others too small. In all it is uneven. Vegetable soup is always vegetable soup and the price is 4 cents; but price is the only constant factor, for the materials used vary from school to school. That is a nickel will buy more food, often of better quality, in one school than it will in another."[11]

Milk was furnished to all schools by one dairy selected by the lunchroom supervisor.

> "All other supplies are chosen by the individual concessionaires, who are entirely responsible for the service. In a number of schools they prepare the food themselves, which increases their difficulties for they are frequently interrupted by tradespeople, by lunchroom helpers asking questions, by stray students who need attention, and by teachers on diet who want beef juice or an eggnog, or by other teachers who have a

> free hour and want a special meal. Lunch has to be prepared in between these demands and dishes are sometimes ready long before the regular lunch period."[12]

Naturally, concessionaires had no guaranteed, minimum income. During the 1914–15 school year, concessionaire's profits ranged from $942 in one school to as little as $124 in another. The median for 10 schools was $605.

The comments of a survey Committee concerning the "Place of Lunch Service in the School System" is worthy of special note:

> "School lunches meet a natural need of all children. The purpose of the service is to teach children to choose wisely the food they buy. The conduct of school lunches is a business, and art, and a science. The Superintendent of Lunches should have the same rank as the director of any other special division and be compensated accordingly. She should be subordinate to the educational department, for her work bears a direct relation to all health teaching in the schools and offer an opportunity to teach children the ethics and economics of spending, and various factors affecting the price of school meals and restaurant meals."[13]

In the summary of its findings and recommendations the survey committee states, among other things.

> "The school lunch division should reach all children; it should provide wholesome and nutritious food for them at cost, train them in sane habits of eating, and teach them to choose wisely what food they buy."[14]

Cincinnati

Almost simultaneously with the installation of lunchrooms in Cleveland, civic and social organizations were preparing for serving penny lunches in at least one school in Cincinnati. Here, again, the school board furnished the equipment, excepting that the very first equipment was paid for from private donations.

Five food items were served every day, two of which were hot foods. Each item was sold for a penny. The following are samples of menu offerings:

> 1. Hot meat sandwich, baked sweet potato, oranges, candy balls, graham crackers.
>
> 2. Hot wieners, rice pudding in cones, candy, bananas, cakes.

The salary of the cook was paid by the Council of Jewish Women. All other costs were met by lunchroom receipts.

St. Louis

In St. Louis, five schools in congested areas of the city were selected for an experiment in school lunch services in October 1911. High schools already had some form of lunch service, but it was decided to expand the services to elementary schools primarily for poorly nourished children and for those children who could not go home at noon. About 900 children were participating in the five centers. At the outset the food was prepared at the Central High School kitchen and transported to the elementary schools. This was found to be excessively costly, however, and after a month's experience the preparation was transferred to each of the participating schools.

Originally the board purchased the food, but

> "It was decided, however, that it was illegal to spend public funds for the purchase of food and the board was obliged to abandon the work."[15]

Consequently, the programs were required to be self-supporting aside from the cost of equipment, which was paid by the board.

Rural School

Nationally, rural schools had a special problem in attempting to establish warm noonday lunches for their pupils. Almost without exception there was no room available for setting up a kitchen and dining area. Children came to school from long distances, and their lunches at noon consisted mainly of cold sandwiches, many of them of questionable nutritive value.

Efforts were made beginning in the early 1900's to provide some means of warming certain foods brought from home or to prepare a hot food of some kind at school as a supplement to the foods brought from home. Public funds for such purposes were generally not available. But many ingenious teachers devised plans for preparing soups or similar hot dishes from meats and vegetables brought to school by pupils as a donation for the general use of all. Students took turns in helping to prepare the foods before the morning session began. Such dishes were cooked in a large kettle set on top of the stove which also heated the school room.

In Wisconsin, an extensive program known as "the pint jar method" was used in heating foods brought from home. Students were encouraged to bring such items as soups, macaroni, cocoa, etc. in a pint jar. The pint jars were set into a bucket of water on top of the room heater or stove, and by lunch time such foods would be piping hot. Much stress was placed upon the importance of students receiving some hot food at school each day to supplement the cold sandwiches (sometimes frozen solid by the time the student reached school).

County home demonstration agents of the University Extension Service were extremely helpful to rural schools in devising plans for providing some supplementary hot foods and in drawing up lists of suggested "menus" in advance.

Parent-Teacher Associations became increasingly concerned and active in the school lunch movement, and supported activities through donations of funds and equipment. Pots, pans, cooking utensils, portable ovens, and domestic type ranges were often donated by the associations or even by individual families. Such assistance was invaluable in getting the program started in many rural and village schools.

"The school lunch division should reach all children; it should provide wholesome and nutritious food for them at cost, train them in sane habits of eating, and teach them to choose wisely what food they buy."

In 1914 the Pinellas County (Florida) health officer, decided to experiment at the school to see what results would come out of a program which would provide each child with a half pint of milk a day.

To get the program started a large white cow was placed on the playground with posters and other material to explain what was being attempted. Amid this setting the children were served their milk.

The health officer was so impressed with the results that he suggested they serve a bowl of soup to the children with the milk.

A group of mothers and the principal planned and carried out the project serving the children a hot bowl of soup with crackers and one-half pint of milk. The meat and some of the potatoes were donated by the mothers. They also furnished the utensils, and the principal supplied the vegetables grown in the school garden.

Under these varied means of support—by philanthropic organizations, school oriented associations, school district boards and individuals—the school lunch program continued to expand gaining momentum during the decade of the 1920's. It was estimated that by 1931 there were 64,500 cafeterias in operation throughout the country in

addition to perhaps 11,500 smaller units serving a single hot dish daily.

The depression years of the 1930's deepened the concern over hunger and malnourishment among school children, and many states and municipalities adopted legislation, some of them including appropriations, to enable schools to serve noonday meals to their children.[16]

State Legislation and Programs

By 1937, 15 states had passed laws specifically authorizing local school boards to operate lunchrooms. Although the laws commonly authorized the serving of meals at cost, usually the cost of the food only, four states made special provisions for needy children. In Indiana (for cities of over 300,000 inhabitants—Indianapolis was the only one), and in Vermont, the boards were authorized to furnish lunches without cost to poor children, and in Missouri (for cities over 500,000—St. Louis was the only one), and Wisconsin at less than cost prices.[17]

Early Federal Aid

Although both state and local legislation authorized local school districts to provide meals for children through various means, it soon became evident that local governments and school district boards could not provide the funds necessary to carry the increasing load. Supplementary contributions by charitable organizations and individuals did not suffice. Aid from federal sources became inevitable.

The earliest federal aid came from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation in 1932 and 1933 when it granted loans to several towns in southwestern Missouri to cover the cost of labor employed in preparing and serving school lunches. Such federal assistance was expanded to other areas in 1933 and 1934 under the operations of the Civil Works Administration and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, reaching into 39 states and covering the employment of 7,442 women.

Commodity Donation Program

The depression of the 1930's brought on widespread unemployment. Millions of people in the cities lost their jobs and were without means of support for themselves and their families. They were obliged to seek help through public assistance programs.

Much of the production of the farm went begging for a market, surplus of farm products continued to mount, prices of farm products declined to a point where farm income provided only a meager subsistence. Millions of school children were unable to pay for their school lunches, and with but limited family resources to provide meals at home, the danger of malnutrition among children became a national concern. Federal assistance became essential, and Congressional action was taken in 1935 to aid both agriculture and the school lunch program.

Public Law 320, passed by the 74th Congress and approved August 24, 1935, made available to the Secretary of Agriculture an amount of money equal to 30 percent of the gross receipts from duties collected under the customs laws during each calendar year. The sums were to be maintained in a separate fund to be used by the Secretary to encourage the domestic consumption of certain agricultural commodities (usually those in surplus supply) by diverting them from the normal channels of trade and commerce. The object of this legislation was to remove price-depressing surplus foods from the market through government purchase and dispose of them through exports and domestic donations to consumers in such a way as not to interfere with normal sales.

Needy families and school lunch programs became constructive outlets for the commodities purchased by the USDA under the terms of such legislation. Many needy school children could not afford to pay for lunches and were sorely in need of supplementary foods from a nutritional standpoint. Thus they would be using foods at school which would not otherwise be purchased in the market place and farmers would be helped by obtaining an outlet for their products at a reasonable price. The

purchase and distribution program was assigned in 1935 to the Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation which had been established in 1933 as the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation to distribute surplus pork, dairy products, and wheat to the needy. In March 1937, there were 3,839 schools receiving commodities for lunch programs serving 342,031 children daily. Two years later, the number of schools participating had grown to 14,075 and the number of children had risen to 892,259.

In a still further effort to be of assistance, the Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation (and later the Surplus Marketing Administration) employed a special representative in each state in 1939–40 to work with state and local school authorities, Parent-Teacher Associations, mothers' clubs and similar organizations in an effort to expand the school lunch program.

The growth of the program from 1939 to 1942 is evidence of the success of their efforts. During that period the number of schools participating increased by 78,851, and the number of pupils participating increased by 5,272,540. The 1941–42 school year became the peak year in participation and in the use of commodities in school lunch programs before the effects of World War II upon the food supply became evident. During that year, 454 million pounds of food valued at over $21 million were allotted to schools.

Before an agency such as a school board, P.T.A., mothers' club, or other civic or social organization sponsoring a school lunch program could receive surplus commodities, it was required to enter into a written agreement with the state distributing agency providing substantially:

> That the commodities would be used for preparation of school lunches on the school premises.
>
> That the commodities would not be sold or exchanged.
>
> That the food purchases would not be discontinued or curtailed because of the receipt of surplus foods.
>
> That the program would not be operated for profit.
>
> That the children who could not pay for their meals would not be segregated or discriminated against and would not be identified to their peers.
>
> That proper warehousing would be provided and proper accounting would be rendered for all foods received.

At first, commodities were allotted to schools based upon the number of undernourished and underprivileged children participating in the program. However, this was soon changed to an allotment based on the total number of children participating in the program.

The maximum quantity of any food that any school could receive was based upon a maximum quantity per child per month established by USDA. This method of allocation persists to this day, with the exception that for some items the allocation is unlimited if the supply is adequate.

W.P.A. Assistance

Although the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, the Civil Works Administration and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration provided some financial assistance in payment of labor employed in the school lunch program from 1932 to 1934, it was not until the advent of the Works Progress Administration (later changed to Work Projects Administration) that a very substantial contribution from federal sources became available in this area of program operations. This agency was created in 1935 to provide work for needy persons on public works projects. School lunch work was assigned to the Community Service Division of W.P.A. Since there were unemployed, needy women in nearly every city, town, village and rural community of the country, the preparation and serving of school lunches became a very ready area of employment to which such women could be assigned. In addition, they could be employed as bakers, clerks, typists, etc. where the size and nature of the program warranted.

The work was under the direction of a W.P.A. supervisor at the state level. This supervisor, in turn, had a supporting staff of district and local school lunch supervisors who called on the workers in the individual schools to give them needed direction and help. The supervisory staff was generally chosen from people who had special knowledge and abilities in food service.

Menus, recipes and manuals were developed at the state and district supervisory levels which were of inestimable value to local cooks and helpers in the performance of their duties and did much to improve the quality of the meals served as well as to set standards for equipment, sanitation and safety in the lunch program.

With much of the labor being provided without cost to a school district, lunch prices were held to a minimum, more children participated and the natural outcome was a very rapid expansion in the program throughout the Nation.

In some areas, projects involving canning foods for the lunch program were undertaken during the summer months when schools were not in session. At times, this involved the preservation of fresh fruits or vegetables received as surplus items, while in some school districts and communities garden projects were set up to provide additional foods for the school lunch program. Some of these foods were canned by personnel employed by the W.P.A.

In March 1941, W.P.A. school lunch programs were in operation in all states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, providing help in 23,160 schools serving an average of nearly 2 million lunches daily and employing 64,298 persons.

N.Y.A. Assistance

The National Youth Administration was another federal agency which also provided assistance to the school lunch program. This agency was also founded in 1935, having as its purpose job training for unemployed youth and providing part-time work for needy students. Since they could be employed only under adult supervision, N.Y.A. employees did not manage lunch programs but supplied much needed assistance as part-time helpers. They also supplied help in making tables, chairs and other equipment for the lunchrooms. In April, 1941 over 16,000 youths were employed in school lunch projects in 42 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Effects of World War II

In February 1942, the school lunch program operating under the assistance from W.P.A. and N.Y.A. and receiving donated foods reached 92,916 schools serving 6 million children daily.

The effect of World War II upon the nation's economy was making itself evident, however. As defense industries provided work for more people, W.P.A. payrolls declined sharply, and the agency's activities came to a close in the early part of 1943.

The huge supply of food required for the support of U.S. Armed Forces and allies soon drained off farm surpluses, except for a few sporadic oversupplies of some items from time to time. Consequently, the kinds of quantities of foods available for distribution to school lunch programs became comparatively negligible, dropping from the high of 454 million pounds in 1942 to 93 million pounds in 1944. Labor supplied by W.P.A. had been completely eliminated. The effect upon the school lunch program was dramatically shown.

By April 1944, there were only 34,064 schools serving some 5 million children in the program. But a further decline was not to occur.

Authorization of Federal Funds

The 78th Congress in July 1943 enacted Public Law 129, amending Section 32 of the Agricultural Act of 1935, authorizing the expenditure of Section 32 funds not in excess of $50 million for maintaining the school lunch and school milk programs during the fiscal year July 1, 1943 to June 30, 1944.

This assistance was in the form of cash subsidy payments to school lunch sponsors for the pur-

chase of food for the program. No part of the funds could be used for the payment of labor or for the purchase of equipment. Without it the decline in participation previously noted would undoubtedly have been even more drastic. It took time to reach schools with the information, place the procedures into operation, and reestablish programs which had closed down.

The following year there was an improvement in legislation and a further expansion of the program. Under the provisions of Public Law 367, the 78th Congress again set aside $50 million of Section 32 funds for carrying on the school lunch program in 1944–45, and extended the authority to include child care centers. For the first time, the legislation also provided some details as to conditions under which federal assistance could be received:

Cash payments could not exceed the cost of food purchased for use in the program.

Accurate records of cost of food had to be maintained.

Total payments of federal funds in any state could not exceed the total amount provided for food purchases by the school lunch sponsors, school districts, or other sources within the state, including the value of donated services and supplies.

Again for the 1945–46 school year, the same amount was appropriated as in the previous year, but the legislation included a provision that no more than two percent of the funds allotted to any state could be used for lunch programs in childcare centers. Because of a rapid expansion of the program, Congress appropriated an additional $7.5 million in December 1945, in order to continue the payments to schools until the end of the school year. By April 1946, the program had expanded to include 45,119 schools serving 6.7 million children daily, representing an increase of some 11,000 schools and about 1.5 million children over the 1943–44 school year.

National School Lunch Act Approved

Nevertheless, the program was not expanding as rapidly as desirable. The year-to-year appropriations by the Congress without legislation assuring a continuation of program operations in years ahead, and the past experience of a drastic falling off in federal support by means of donated foods, made school boards hesitant to undertake the program.

Equipment installations, especially in the larger schools in cities and rural consolidated districts, were expensive. In the majority of school buildings there was no available room suitable to the installation of kitchen equipment, separate dining space was not available, and additions to or extensive remodeling of existing buildings would be necessary if the program were to be inaugurated. Without some guarantee as to a future, this was regarded as a high-risk investment and hampered program growth.

The 79th Congress (1946) recognized the need. Legislation was introduced to give the program a permanent status and to authorize the necessary appropriations for it.[18] Following hearings on the proposed legislation, the House Committee on Agriculture Report stated, in part:

> "The need for a permanent legislative basis for a school lunch program, rather than operating it on a year-to-year basis, or one dependent solely on agricultural surpluses that for a child may be nutritionally unbalanced or nutritionally unattractive, has now become apparent. The expansion of the program has been hampered by lack of basic legislation. If there is an assurance of continuity over a period of years, the encouragement of state contribution and participation in the school lunch program will be of great advantage in expanding the program."
>
> "The national school lunch bill provides basic, comprehensive legislation for aid, in general, to the states in the operation of school lunch programs as permanent and integral parts of their school systems...

> Such aid, heretofore extended by Congress through the Department of Agriculture has, for the past 10 years, proven for exceptional benefit to the children, schools, and agriculture of the country as a whole, but the necessity for now coordinating the work throughout the nation, and especially to encourage and increase the financial participation and active control by the several states makes it desirable that permanent enabling legislation take the place of the present temporary legislative structure... The educational features of a properly chosen diet served at school should not be under emphasized. Not only is the child taught what a good diet consists of, but his parents and family likewise are indirectly instructed."[19]

The legislation was identified as the "National School Lunch Act", and Section 2 of the Act defines its purposes:

> "It is hereby declared to be the policy of Congress, as a measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation's children and to encourage the domestic consumption of nutritious agricultural commodities and other food by assisting the states, through grants-in-aid and other means, in providing an adequate supply of food and other facilities for the establishment, maintenance, operation and expansion of nonprofit school lunch programs."

Child Nutrition Act of 1966

A new dimension was added to school food services with the enactment of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966. In its Declaration of Purpose in Section 2 of the Act, the Congress stated,

> "In recognition of the demonstrated relationship between food and good nutrition and the capacity of children to develop and learn, based on the years of cumulative successful experience under the National School Lunch Program with its significant contributions in the field of applied nutrition research, it is hereby declared to be the policy of Congress that these efforts shall be extended, expanded and strengthened under the authority of the Secretary of Agriculture as a measure to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation's children, and to encourage the domestic consumption of agricultural and other foods, by assisting states, through grants-in-aid and other means, to meet more effectively the nutritional needs of our children."

Centralized School Food Programs Authorized

With several federal agencies involved to some degree in feeding school children (such as Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Indian Affairs) the Congress decided that the "conduct and supervision of federal programs to assist schools in providing food service programs for children" should be assigned to the Department of Agriculture. This could be accomplished, it was felt, by a transfer of school food service funds from other agencies to USDA.

With all school food services under one federal agency, there could be uniform standards as to nutrition, sanitation, management of funds, supervision, guidance, use of equipment and space, and some guarantee of program continuity. With several agencies having jurisdiction over various kinds of feeding programs in schools, there often developed dual administration within a school, lack of communication, confusion in records of the use of federally-donated foods, etc. Since the Child Nutrition Act provided for participation in all programs by preschool children as well as those of elementary and secondary grade levels, the consolidation of all programs was a timely step. Section 13 of the Child Nutrition Act provided the authority for placing all school food services under one agency.

[1] Gordon W. Gunderson, a native of Wisconsin, was selected in the fall of 1939 to represent the U.S. Department of Agriculture

to supervise its program in Wisconsin of distributing donated commodities to establish school lunch programs. During World War II, his duties also included the administration of war food programs in the state.

Upon passage of the *National School Lunch Act* in 1946, he was selected to administrate the school lunch program for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. He also was administrator of the commodity distribution program for schools, institutions, needy households, summer camps, and other eligible outlets. The Special Milk Program was inaugurated in 1954 and was added to his supervision.

Mr. Gunderson retired on December 31, 1969 after serving over 30 years in the development and expansion of the school food service programs in Wisconsin.

[2] A Bill to Amend the *Education Act of 1902. Provision of Meals Act of 1905, British Parliamentary Papers*, 1905 (132) 1-p 485.

[3] Louise Stevens Bryant, *School Feeding: Its History and Practice at Home and Abroad*, Philadelphia and London, J.B. Lippincott, 1913, pp. 44–45.

[4] Marjorie L. Scott, *School Feeding: Its Contribution to Child Nutrition*, Rome, Italy, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, November, 1953.

[5] *Times Educational Supplement*, London, July 22, 1939, p. 299.

[6] *School Lunches*, Yearbook Separate No. 3004, U.S. Department of Agriculture, p. 692.

[7] Robert Hunter, *Poverty*: Social Conscience in the Progressive Era, Harper & Row, New York, Evanston and London, 1965, p. 217.

[8] Emma Smedley, *The School Lunch: Its Organization and Management in Philadelphia*, Smedley, 1920.

[9] Marion Cronan, *The School Lunch*, Peoria, Illinois, Charles A. Bennett, Inc., 1962.

[10] John Spargo, *The Bitter Cry of the Children*, Chicago, Quadrangle Books, 1906, p.117.

[11] Alice C. Boughton, Household Arts and School Lunches, *Cleveland Education Survey* 1915, pp, 145–146.

[12] Ibid., p. 151

[13] Alice C. Boughton, Household Arts and School Lunches, *Cleveland Education Survey* 1915, p.162.

[14] The findings and recommendations in the report contain no reference to provision of meals to children who were unable to pay.

[15] Department of Interior, Bureau of Education *Bulletin No. 37*, 1921, p. 24.

[16] Howard L. Briggs, and Constance C. Hart, From Basket Lunches to Cafeterias-A Story of Progress, *Nation's Schools*, 8: 51–5, 1931.

[17] The Bureau of Agricultural Economics, USDA, The School Lunch Program and Agricultural Surplus Disposal, *Miscellaneous Publication No. 467*, October 1941.

[18] Public Law S96, 79th Congress, June 4, 1946, 60 Stat. 231.

[19] *House Committee on Agriculture Report* P.L. S96–79th Congress June 4, 1946. See Chronological Legislative History of Child Nutrition Programs, F&NS, U.S.D.A.

Notes: